

Social Justice and Empowerment

3.1 Development and empowerment of scheduled castes (SCs), scheduled tribes (STs), other backward classes (OBCs), minorities, disabled and other social groups in order to bring them at par with the rest of society is a commitment enshrined in the Constitution. This is to be done by adopting the approach of 'social justice' to ensure equal rights, access to benefits and resources and 'empowerment' to enable them to develop their potential and capacities as agents of social change, through the process of planned development.

SOCIALLY DISADVANTAGED GROUPS

3.2. The socially disadvantaged groups include the SCs, OBC and minorities. The SCs number 166.64 million (16.2 per cent) and minorities 189.4 million (18.42 per cent) according to the 2001 Census. The OBCs, as per a Government of India notification of 8 September 1993, include castes and communities which are named in both the list contained in the Report of the Backward Classes Commission (Mandal Commission) and in the list of individual state governments. In the absence of specific Census data, it is difficult to put an exact figure on the OBC population. The Mandal Commission had estimated them as 52 per cent of the country's total population.

COMMITMENTS OF TENTH PLAN

3.3. The Tenth Five-Year Plan is committed to empowering the socially disadvantaged groups. The stated objectives were:

- Creating an enabling environment that is conducive for these groups to exercise their rights freely, enjoy their privileges

and be able to lead a life with confidence and dignity.

- Ensuring removal of disparities, eliminating exploitation and suppression and providing protection to the disadvantaged groups.
- Ensuring that developmental benefits reach the unreached through equitable distribution.
- Ensuring the involvement of the socially disadvantaged groups in the process of planning not merely as beneficiaries but also as participants in the formulation of need-based programmes/projects, as well as their implementation, supervision and monitoring.
- Accelerating the on-going process of improving the socio-economic status of the disadvantaged groups through effective implementation of various policies and programmes and thus bring them at par with rest of the society.

3.4. Concerted efforts are being made both at the governmental and non-governmental levels, through effective implementation of various welfare and developmental policies and programmes, towards achieving:

- Social empowerment, especially through educational development.
- Economic empowerment, through employment and income generation activities and alleviating poverty.
- Social justice, through effective implementation of the existing legislations and other measures for preventing and protecting the disadvantaged groups from atrocities,

exploitation, discrimination and social disabilities.

3.5 In order to ensure optimum utilisation of funds, efforts were made through a zero-based budgeting exercise to rationalise programmes and reduce the 31 on-going schemes of Ninth Plan to 13 schemes (four Central sector and nine Centrally sponsored schemes) in the Tenth Plan.

SOCIAL EMPOWERMENT

3.6. Education is the basic requirement and the most effective instrument of social empowerment. Effective implementation of the Centrally sponsored scheme of Post-Matric Scholarship (PMS) to SC Students – involving 100 per cent financial assistance to states over and above their earlier committed liability – has been accorded high priority during the Tenth Plan period. The scholarships are awarded to all eligible SC students to pursue their education beyond matriculation and in other professional courses based on a means test, and covers payment of tuition and compulsory fees besides maintenance allowance. Under the existing funding pattern, the expenditure incurred at the end of one Plan period is met by the states as their committed liability. The expenditure over and above this committed liability is met under the Plan head by the Centre.

3.7 The scheme was revised in 2003. One, courses were regrouped and the existing maintenance allowance increased. Two, the income ceiling of parents of SC students was hiked. Three, the Book Bank for SC students scheme was merged into the scheme. Fourth, charges pertaining to study tour, thesis typing/printing charges were enhanced.

3.8 About 2 million SC students were provided scholarships during 2002-03 and 2003-04 and an additional 200,000 students are likely to be covered in 2004-05. During the first three years of the Tenth Plan, an amount of Rs.681.39 crore (43.7 per cent) has been released to states/Union Territories for the scheme.

3.9 Most of the states find it difficult to meet the commitment of non-Plan liability

because of resource constraints. This is a serious problem because not only will the coverage of the scheme increase every year but the rates of scholarships are also likely to be increased periodically. The other dimension of the problem is that the states are not disbursing the stipend in time. A suitable mechanism needs to be put in place to ensure timely allocation of funds by the Centre to the states and disbursement of scholarships by the states each month from the beginning of the academic year.

3.10 Various evaluation studies conducted by, among others, the Babasaheb Ambedkar National Institute of Social Sciences, Madhya Pradesh (2000), Tata Institute of Social Sciences (1999), Centre for Research Action and Training (2000), have suggested that increase in the maintenance allowance be linked with the movement of the consumer price index for industrial workers; special incentives be given to the staff of educational institutes; the eligibility criterion of annual income of parents be raised; and rented rooms be provided to outstation students who do not get hostel facility etc. As the scheme has been found to be making a significant impact on the educational attainment of SCs, the reports have recommended that this benefit should be extended to some other economically backward communities, including minority communities. There is a need to enhance the opportunities to SC & ST student to pursue higher studies especially M.Phil and Ph.D in view of the changing economic and labour market scenario demanding higher qualifications for senior placements/jobs. To this effect, a national fellowship scheme for SC & ST students needs to be formulated and expeditiously operationalized/implemented. The details of outlays and expenditure pertaining to the schemes relating to the educational development of SCs, OBCs and the minorities are given in Annexure 3.1.

3.11 The scheme of Pre-Matric Scholarships for children of those engaged in unclean occupations is being implemented with the objective of weaning these children away from menial occupations, especially manual

scavenging. Since 1st April 2003, when the scheme was revised, scholarships have been given at the rate of Rs.40 per month for day scholars in Classes I-V, Rs.60 for Classes VI-VIII and Rs.75 for Classes IX-X. The rate of scholarships for hostellers is Rs.300 for Classes III-VIII and Rs.375 for Classes IX-X.

3.12 About 700,000 children will be covered under the scheme by 2004-05. A sum of Rs.27.41 crore was released (31.5 per cent of total Plan outlay) for the scheme during the first three years of the Tenth Plan. A similar scheme of 'Merit Based Scholarships' is being implemented to encourage higher education among OBCs and students from the minority communities pursuing studies at pre-matric and post-matric level.

3.13 The Centrally sponsored scheme of 'Hostels for SC, OBC and Minority Students' studying at the high school, college and university level is meant to reduce the high drop out rates and increase retention rates among SCs, educationally backward OBCs and minorities. A total of 839 hostels (695 for SCs and 144 for OBCs) have been constructed during the first three years of the Plan, benefiting 50,996 additional SC and OBC hostellers. This involved an expenditure of Rs.165.94 crore, which was 47.8 per cent of the Tenth Plan total outlay of Rs.347 crore. However, evaluation studies show that infrastructure facilities are quite poor in most of the hostels; maintenance of the buildings is not up to the mark and that states are not providing matching grants or releasing funds in time.

Table 3.1.1
Literacy rates of SCs and STs: The gains and gaps between 1991 and 2001

Indicators	1991					2001				
	Rates			Gap		Rates			Gap	
	Total	SC	ST	SC	ST	Total	SC	ST	SC	ST
Total Literacy	52.2	37.4	29.6	-14.8	-22.6	64.8	54.7	47.1	-10.1	-17.7
Male	64.1	49.9	40.7	-14.2	-23.4	75.3	66.6	59.2	-8.73	-16.1
Female	39.3	23.8	18.2	-15.5	-21.1	53.7	41.9	34.8	-11.8	-18.9
Gross Enrolment Ratio										
Classes I – V	(1997 -98)					(2001-02)				
Total	89.7	92.4	90.7	+2.7	+1.0	96.3	93.00	96.3	-3.3	+0.9
Boys	97.7	102.3	102.9	+4.6	+5.2	105.3	103.1	106.9	-2.2	+1.6
Girls	81.2	81.6	78.3	+0.4	+2.9	86.9	82.3	85.1	-4.6	-1.8
Classes VI- VIII	(1997-98)					(2001-02)				
Total	58.5	48.9	43.2	-9.6	-15.3	60.2	69.6	70.3	+9.4	+10.1
Boys	66.5	75.8	53.0	+9.3	-13.5	67.8	80.3	82.1	+12.5	+14.3
Girls	49.5	37.6	32.9	-11.9	-16.6	52.1	57.7	57.3	+5.6	+5.2
Drop-out Rates (Classes I – VIII) (1997-98)						(2001-02)				
Total	60.5	66.6	74.7	+6.1	+14.2	54.7	60.7	69.5	+6.1	+14.9
Boys	58.3	63.6	75.4	+5.3	+17.1	52.9	58.6	67.3	+5.7	+8.7
Girls	63.5	71.0	80.9	+7.5	+17.4	56.9	63.6	72.7	+6.7	+9.1

Source: 1. Selected Educational Statistics, 1998-99 and 2001-02 Department of Education, Government of India, New Delhi.

2. Education in India 2001-02, Department of Education, Government of India, New Delhi 2003.